CLAIMS

1. A heat-sealable, composite film said film comprising a polymeric substrate layer having a first and second surface and disposed on a surface of the substrate layer a water-soluble barrier layer, wherein

(i) the substrate layer has one or more venting means therein; and

(ii) the thickness of the barrier layer is from about 0.05 to about 40 μm.

2. A film according to claim 1 wherein the thickness of the barrier layer is from about 5 to about 30 μm

3. A film according to any preceding claim wherein the barrier layer is selected from polysaccharides, polyvinyl alcohol, vinyl alcohol copolymers, polyvinylpyrrolidone and polypeptides.

4. A film according to claim 3 wherein the barrier layer is selected from chitosan, xanthan gum, cellulose derivatives, starch and starch derivatives and vinyl acetate-vinyl alcohol-polyoxyalkylene methacrylate copolymers.

5. A film according to any preceding claim wherein the barrier layer is disposed on the first surface of the substrate.

6. A film according to any of claims 1 to 5 wherein the substrate layer is a polyolefin.

7. A film according to any of claims 1 to 5 wherein the substrate comprises polyester.

8. A film according to any of claims 1 to 5 wherein the substrate comprises polyethylene terephthalate.

9. A film according to any of claims 1 to 8 wherein the substrate layer is a heat-sealable layer.

10. A film according to any of claims 1 to 8 wherein there is disposed on the second surface of the substrate layer a heat-sealable layer.

11. A film according to claim 10 wherein the heat-sealable layer is a copolyester derived from ethylene glycol, terephthalic acid and isophthalic acid, preferably wherein the molar ratio of the terephthalic acid component to the isophthalic acid component is in the range from 65:35 to 85:15, and more preferably is about 82:18.

12. A film according to claim 10 wherein the heat-sealable layer is a copolyester derived from terephthalic acid, ethylene glycol and 1,4-cyclohexanedimethanol, preferably wherein the molar ratio of 1,4-cyclohexanedimethanol to ethylene glycol is in the range from 30:70 to 35:65, and more preferably is about 33:67

13. A film according to claim 10 wherein the heat-sealable layer is a copolyester derived from an aromatic dicarboxylic acid, an aliphatic dicarboxylic acid and a stoichiometric amount of one or more glycols, wherein the concentration of said aromatic dicarboxylic acid in the copolyester is in the range from 50 to 55 mole % based on all the dicarboxylic acid components of the copolyester, and the concentration of said aliphatic dicarboxylic acid in the copolyester is in the range from 45 to 50 mole % based on all the dicarboxylic acid components of the copolyester.

14. A film according to claim 13 wherein said aromatic dicarboxylic acid is terephthalic acid, wherein said aliphatic dicarboxylic acids are selected from sebacic acid, adipic acid and azelaic acid, and wherein the glycol component is ethylene or butylene glycol.

15. A film according to claim 10 wherein said heat-sealable layer comprises an ethylene vinyl acetate (EVA) having a vinyl acetate content in the range of 9% to 40%.

16. A film according to any preceding claim wherein the self-venting means comprises incisions which are from about 1 to about 40 mm in length.

17. A film according to claim 16 having from 1 to 100 incisions per 200 cm^2.

18. A film according to any preceding claim wherein the self-venting means comprises perforations having an average diameter from about 0.05 to about 1.5 mm.

19. A film according to claim 18 wherein the self-venting means comprises from about 1 to about 100,000 perforations per 200 cm^2.

20. A film according to claim 18 or 19 wherein a perforated substrate has a degree of perforation of from about 0.001 to about 50%.

21. A process for producing a heat-sealable composite film comprising

(a) providing a polymeric substrate layer having a first and second surface and optionally a discrete heat-sealable layer disposed on the second surface of the substrate;

(b) providing one or more venting means in said substrate and if present said discrete heat-sealable layer; and

(c) providing a water-soluble barrier layer on a surface of the substrate,

wherein the thickness of the barrier layer is from about 0.05 to about 40 μm.

22. A process according to claim 21 wherein the barrier layer is coated onto the substrate.

23. Use of a film according to any of claims 1 to 20 as packaging for an ovenable meal.

24. Use of a film according to claim 23 as a self-venting film in the packaging of an ovenable meal.

25. Use of a film according to claim 23 or 24 as a lid in said packaging, said packaging further comprising a receptacle for the ovenable meal.

26. A packaged food product wherein the packaging comprises a film according to any of claims 1 to 20.

27. A packaged food product according to claim 26 wherein the packaging comprises a receptacle containing the food product, and a lid formed from a polymeric film according to any of claims 1 to 20.

28. A packaged food product according to claim 26 wherein the packaging which is a composite film as defined herein which is heat-sealed to itself.

29. A packaged food product according to any of claims 26 to 28 wherein the food product is an ovenable meal.